

APPLICATION
FOR
UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

TITLE: ELECTRICALLY-CONDUCTIVE GRID SHIELD FOR
SEMICONDUCTORS

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CERTIFICATE OF MAILING BY EXPRESS MAIL

Express Mail Label No. EV 321 383 618 US

August 27, 2003
Date of Deposit

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a divisional application of and claims priority from Serial No. 09/547,475 filed April 12, 2000 and entitled "ELECTRICALLY-CONDUCTIVE GRID SHIELD FOR SEMICONDUCTORS" hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

In semiconductor devices, a transient electrical field may induce currents that result in false indications. Optocouplers may be especially susceptible to such phenomena when a high voltage pulse is received at the input stage. To overcome this problem, an electrically-conductive shield is provided to terminate and dissipate the electrical field while allowing light to pass.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figures 1 and 2 are cross-sections of an optocoupler; and
Figure 3 illustrates a grid for shielding a photodiode.
Figure 4 illustrates a shield fashioned from parallel lines.
Figure 5 illustrates a shield fashioned from concentric circles
Figure 6 illustrates a shield fashioned from a spiral line.

SUMMARY

In one aspect, the invention is directed to a shielded semiconductor device. The device has semiconductor structure with a surface and a photodiode, and a shield with one or more electrically conductive elements and one or more apertures therethrough. The shield is deposited over a portion of the surface of the semiconductor structure to prevent electric fields from reaching the photodiode and permit light to pass through the apertures to the photodiode.

Implementations of the invention may include one or more of the following features. The electrically conductive elements may define a grid, a series of parallel lines, concentric circles, or

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a spiral, and may be fabricated from a conductor such as aluminum, copper, gold, silver, polysilicon, or a silicide. The electrically-conductive elements may be fabricated from an interconnect layer. The electrically conductive elements may be connected to ground potential or another potential.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A cross-section of an optocoupler is shown in Figure 1. There, a light-emitting diode (LED) 10 generates light that impinges on the surface of a photodiode 20. If a transient electrical signal, such as a spike, appears at the input to the coupler, care must be taken to avoid

10 transmission from the LED 10 to the photodiode 20. When a large impulse signal appears at the input to the optocoupler, an electric field may be generated at the LED 10. If the signal is large enough, the field will cross over to the photodiode 20, inducing a current in the photodiode 20. Such false indications can be avoided by placing a shield 30 to terminate the electric field between the LED 10 and the photodiode 20, as shown in Figure 2. The electrical shield 30
15 allows some portion of the light output of the LED 10 to pass through, but terminates the electrical field.

The shield 30 can be fashioned as a grid of intersecting lines defining square, rectangular, triangular, or openings of other shapes. A grid 40 of square openings is shown in Figure 3.

The shield 30 (or grid 40) could be deposited directly on the photodiode 20 as a layer
20 having a thickness of 100 Å to 20,000 Å, depending on the process employed to fabricate the underlying devices. Alternatively, where the process provides a metallic interconnect layer, a portion of that layer can be utilized, isolating a section of the layer to create the shield 30 or grid 40.

The lines used to create the shield 30 or grid 40 could be as wide (or narrow) as the
25 photolithographic process allows, e.g., 0.2 µm, up to any desired width, and the spacing between the lines could be the same as the line width or greater to achieve a blockage of almost 90% or less. As an upper limit, one might select a spacing-to-line-width ratio of twenty-to-one, although other ratios, greater or lesser, could be chosen to suit the application. Grids having lines 1 µm in

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thickness and spaced at 10 μm , providing a blockage of approximately 10%, have been created successfully. Where a preexisting interconnect layer is employed, the design rules for the grid will be predefined by the process.

5 Instead of a grid of intersecting lines, the shield 30 could be fashioned by depositing a series of parallel lines 50 as shown in Figure 5, concentric circles 60 as shown in Figure 5, or a spiral 70 as shown in Figure 6, again blocking the electrical field but allowing light to pass.

The lines could be fabricated from any electrically-conductive material, such as aluminum, copper, gold, silver, polysilicon, and silicides.

10 The shield 30 or grid 40 would be connected to a point at ground potential or another potential to help discharge any induced field. As shown in Figure 3, a border 42 at the periphery of the grid 40 provides a convenient connection point.

The shield 30 may be employed in devices other than optocouplers, i.e., in any device where an electrical field requires termination.